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#2

CINEMAPHOBIA

MOE'S DAUGHTER SPEAKS !

SO DOES:

ALYCE WITTENSTEIN

RON MANN

BILL GRIFFITH

HARVEY PEKAR

LINDLEY FARLEY

PLUS: THE LAST WORD ON BATMAN

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INGER PARSONS

Well, here we are again, on the heels of our premiere phantasmagorically successful first issue. I really was amazed at the response **Cinemaphobia** received. Even though it was predominately distributed in the New York metro area, I've received mail from as far away as an air force base in New Mexico (jeez, I didn't know New Mexico had it's own air force!). I have to thank the guys at **Scarephanalia** who apparently wrote nice things about us. I haven't seen it, so could someone send me a copy? It was also nice getting stuff from other film 'zines like **Trash Compactor**, **A Taste of Bile**, and **Grind House**, not to mention attending Mike **Factsheet Five** Gunderloy's wing ding at the Libertarian Book Club this past May.

This has turned out to be our interview issue; we spoke to just about everyone! I really enjoyed speaking with Joan Maurer, the only person in the world who would smile if someone called most of her relatives stooges! The Comicbook Confidential interviews were also kind of nifty, although due to lack of space, there was much good stuff leftover on tape, especially Harvey Pekar's great tale of his falling out with yukster and corporate tool David Letterman. His latest issue of **American Splendor** gives an illustrated version of the fight of the century, and I also heard he wrote an article somewhere about the whole debacle, so it really wasn't breaking news, although it's still a great story and if I can motivate myself I'll probably write the whole thing up as a separate interview for publication somewhere else.

I'm also really happy to showcase the views and insights of independent director Alyce Wittenstein, whose **Betaville** is being considered "the **Batman** of the underground!"--and newcomer Lindley Farley, who's about to make his independent debut with the soon-to-be-released **Boss Of The Ballet**. We want to interview and review more independent filmmakers and their films, so just drop us a line and/or a tape and we'll speak to you!

Now that **Cinemaphobia** is being nationally distributed, there are probably some of you out there who didn't read the first issue. If that's the case, I'll restate that fact that **Cinemaphobia** still needs more writers. Write something you feel would fit our criteria of being the chroniclers of Strange\ Bizarre\ Independent Film and Video, and send it on in! And, if you want to advertise or sell **Cinemaphobia** in your store, that's nice, too.

Enjoy the laser printing while you can!

Robert Carobene
Editor

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JOAN HOWARD MAURER

DAUGHTER OF A STOOGE

ROBERT CAROBENE

The Three Stooges have a significant role in the history of film comedy with their roots in 1920's vaudeville and their final legacies emerging in the modern age of television and video games. The tail end of that career was managed by Norman Maurer, a cartoonist, film director, and television programmer who was largely responsible for the revival of the Stooges career during the sixties and early seventies.

Joan Howard Maurer is not only the wife of the Norman Maurer, but the daughter of Moe Howard. Mrs. Maurer carries on her late husband's work with various public appearances and book projects that are bringing awareness of the Stooges to a whole new generation as well as allowing old time fans another crack at their favorite comedy team.

CINEMAPHOBIA had the honor of talking with Mrs. Maurer about her father, her husband, and her own contribution and impressions of the Stooge phenomenon.

CP:What was is like growing up with a Stooge father and Stooge uncles?

JM:When I was first interviewed on TV, I would explain that I lead a very normal life--to me it was normal. Now that I look back on my childhood, I realize that not every young girl was in all of Moe Howard's home movies, and could visit him on the set. All of my father's home movies were reminiscent of stooge comedies because my mother could be found batting my father around on film. Then after that, I was in at least a dozen films with such superstars as Humphrey Bogart and Shirley Temple.

CP:Then you were a childhood actress.

JM:Well, my dad wanted it for me but I wasn't very comfortable with it, so rather that having a parent who was a movie mother, I had a movie father. During my career, I recall being taken to 20th Century Fox to a "cattle call" for little kids. Daryl Zanuck had the idea of trying to find someone who could imitate Shirley Temple, but who didn't look like her and couldn't sing or dance. Out of one hundred girls I was chosen. I had kinky red hair and very skinny legs and couldn't sing or dance. I squawked out "On The Good Ship Lollypop" in a film called *Reunion* with the Dionne quintuplets. The sad thing was that my part was cut out from the film because it had nothing to do with the story.

CP:How long did your film career last?

JM:Until around age 10. I was in a film where I was supposed to laugh at something that didn't strike me as being funny, and all of a sudden there were 10 or 12 adults staring down at me trying to teach me how to laugh. When my dad arrived at the set and saw what a terrible time I was having, he said "Let's go." And that was the end of that.

CP:Were you separated much from your father while he made the Stooges films?

JM:Well, my dad was away four months out of the year on stage in vaudeville, and he performed in eight shorts a year which also involved a considerable amount of time, so he wasn't home a lot.

CP:But, you did live in California.

JM:Oh yes. We moved quite a few times when I was very young. We rented our homes at first, then we built a huge home in Toluca Lake in the San Fernando Valley. That was such a beautiful English manor house. My father originally bought three lots and sold Curly half the property but he never built on it. The land was finally sold to film director Raoul Walsh.

CP:Where were the Stooges from originally?

JM:Well, they originally lived in the Bath Beach and Bensonhurst area of Brooklyn. All the Howard brothers were born in the United States, but their parents were born in Lithuania.

CP:In your eyes, how instrumental was Ted Healy in the formation of the Stooges?

JM:Ted Healy was a boyhood friend of my father. Although my dad started his career with Shemp. he actually joined Healy in 1922 when one of his acrobats quit. Although Healy did not form the original Stooge act, Shemp and Moe did work with him for almost ten years and a lot of their vaudeville material did emanate from those days.

CP:Did you ever meet Ted Healy?

(All photos in this
article courtesy
Joan Howard Maurer)

JM:I spent a Christmas with my parents at his home when I was about three, but I can't recall anything other than the stories told to me by my mother and father in the later years. Healy's house was supposed to have been magnificent. An estate (with a lake on it) in Darien, Connecticut.

CP:In 1927, your father left the Stooges. What did he do?

JM:He went into the home constructing business. His mother was in Real Estates, so he began building houses. The problem was he built them so well and expensively that he never made his investment back. He did this for about a year. Then he went into the distressed clothing business, where you bought large quantities of clothing, sight unseen. Every item he bought was useless. My mother realized that the business world was not for Moe. When Healy called asking Moe to return to the act, my mother breathed a sigh of relief.

MOE & DAUGHTER JOAN

CP:Did your mother mind that your father was a Stooge?

JM:In the beginning it bothered her. Relatives warned her that she would never lead a normal life married to an actor. Moe did leave show business for the first year of my life, but when he want back to acting, my mother was his most ardent fan.

CP:Tell me about Curly in the early days.

JM:It was fun to watch all that zaniness. At home, I remember Curly diving into our pool, doing "bellywoppers"--half the water would go sailing out of the pool; he loved to swim and so did my dad.

CP:How much did the loss of Curly affect the Stooges?

JM:My father was noticeably reminded of it in the timing of their act. Timing was so important, especially if they were in front of a live audience. Curly had a certain magic about him which my dad could really work with. He worked well with Shemp, but never as well as with Curly.

.And after that, how did the loss of Shemp affect your

THREE YOUNG STOOGES & TED HEALY

JM:Well, each time he lost someone he loved, it made him begin to doubt himself--should the Stooges go on? But he was the kind of a man who had so much energy that he couldn't sit still. He loved what he was doing, so there was some kind of driving force that made him continue.

CP:How did Joe Besser become a Stooge, and then, why did he leave?

JM: I would imagine Joe was chosen because of his physical appearance--he was roly poly like Curly. Either the studio (Columbia) or the Stooges themselves approached him to join the act. The reason he left the Stooges at the end of their career in shorts was due to his wife's ill health. Joe would have had to make personal appearances, and he did not want to leave his wife.

CP:How did your father take Columbia's cancelling of their film contract after 24 years?

JM:Oh, he felt terrible. In fact, I remember that he went to the studio one day to say hello to someone and they wouldn't let him on the lot. They had taken away his pass. That happened once, then after that he seemed to be able to go anytime he wanted to visit someone, but that first time was like cold water being thrown in his face.

CP:How did they hook up with Joe DeRita?

JM:I think Larry had seen him in Las Vegas, and I don't recall the details. But they were in agreement that he was the best choice.

CP:What do you remember about Joe DeRita?

JM:I remember him as being a bit temperamental at times. I never felt he was as funny as Curly, but I liked him better that Joe Besser, a lot better,

CP:Why was this?

JM:Joe Besser was a fine comedian in his own right, but as a Curly replacement, I felt he was rather weak. And, the fact that the Stooges stopped wearing their hair in character, a lot was being taken away from the original Stooges. Also,the Stooges were older--and for three old men to be hitting each other, it just wasn't as funny. It lost something, so I can't say it was all Joe Bessers' fault. It also forced Larry into a different role because Besser didn't want to get hit. He was afraid of the physical violence of the Stooges and insisted that if he took the role that someone else had to take the hitting, and that wound up to be Larry.

THE 60's STOOGES WITH CURLY JOE DeRITA

CP:You mention that they were old by the 1960's, so what was it that breathed new life into the Stooges?

JM:I think that Joe DeRita was a much better character (than Joe Besser), I think that my husband (Norman Maurer) getting into the act helped. He came up with good story lines for their feature films, he got a lot of production value on screen for very low budgets. He was very cautious about the lighting on the set, so my dad looked better then that he had several years earlier. Norman was also instrumental in toning down the violence and my dad was all for this. My father was concerned that some young children would try to copy the slapstick antics of the Stooges. Whenever they appeared before a live audience, he told the children not to do what they did, that they were professionals and knew how to do the gags without hurting each other. For the films that were made in the 60's, violence for violence sake was taken out. They may get hit by something accidentally, but the deliberate violence that Jules White seemed to like was gone.

CP:What did you think of Jules White?

JM:I didn't know him that well. At times he could be quite charming and other times he seemed a bit egotistical, but he knew his job, he was a fine director of that type of slapstick comedy. My father had difficulty getting along with Jules. Jules liked to play out each scene--explaining every nuance--while my dad wanted more spontaneity.

CP:If this was the case, why did your father work with White for so may years?

JM:Jules was hired by Columbia and my father had no say in this matter. He had a contract. Moe liked the end result of most of the shorts but hated the violence for violence sake.

CP:What about the Stooge trademark face slapping and eye poking?

JM:He didn't mind that so much, that was part of the vaudeville act. When they got into film and there were more children in the audience, he felt that the violence should come from the story line and not be gratuitous.

CP:How did the other Stooges feel about Jules White?

JM:I don't think they really took it that seriously. Larry was veryeasy going and Curly probably thinking about his next date!

CP:How did the association between your husband, Norman Maurer, and the Stooges come about?

JM:Well, I met Norman when he was 19. He was a comic book cartoonist in New York City. He worked comic books such as *Daredevil*, *Boy Comics*, and *Crime Does Not Pay*. In the 1940's Norman created several comic books on the Stooges. My father took one look at what Norman was doing with comic books and said, "Gee, you're directing these comic books; you're illustrating them; you're choosing wardrobe. You could do this in the movie industry." Moe introduced Norman to a Hollywood producer, and then he worked on several low budget movies as Associate Producer--*The Angry Red Planet* and *Spacemaster X7*; to name two.

CP:Had any of these films involved the Stooges?

JM:I recall that Moe had a bit part in *Spacemaster*.

CP:How many of the Stooge Films did he direct?

JM:I think two of them--*The Three Stooges Go Around The World in a Daze* and *The Outlaws Is Coming!* He also directed a comedy travelogue called *Kooks Tour (1969-70)* but he was not happy with the result.

CP:Was *Kook's Tour* ever released?

JM:It was released in super-8 somewhere in the mid-west. Actually, Norman had wanted to shelve it, but the Stooges had money invested in the film. Consequently, Norman expanded the half-hour pilot film into an hour, which he felt hurt the project. At about the same time, Larry had a stroke, which also affected the outcome. Finally, it was bought and packaged as a super-8 home movie.

CP:What did Norman do after the Stooges?

JM:Well, he was never really happy with the politics in the film industry so he left to work at ABC and CBS where

LAST KNOWN PHOTO OF STOOGES WITH SHEMP

he wrote and created Saturday morning childrens television programming: *Fonz and the Happy Days Gang*, *Richie Rich* and *The Robonic Stooges* at Hanna Barbera. During the end of his career he tried in vain to get a feature off the ground based on the Stooges, but heads kept rolling at Columbia and there was never anyone to deal with.

CP:Back to the final days of the Stooges; wasn't there a project planned even after Larry was incapacitated by illness?

JM:Yes. My father made a feature deal about a month before he died. It had something to do with a film that was to be shot in the Philippines. They were going to use Emil Sitka in Larry's place, but during the meeting with the producers, Emil got on his high horse and started making all sorts of demands. The money people were taken aback by this and decided to chuck the whole thing.

CP:What do you remember of Emil Sitka?

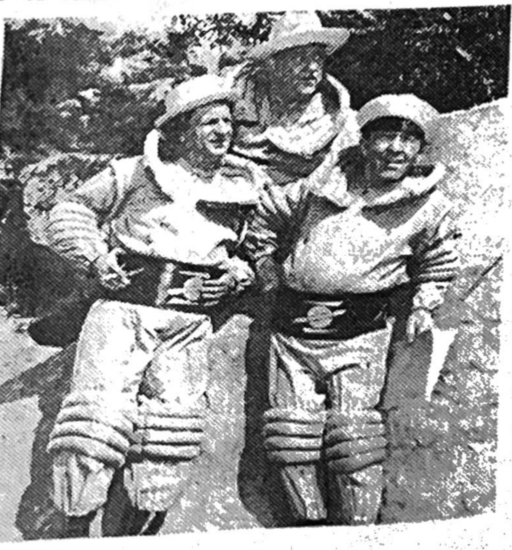
JM:He would come by the house from time to time just to say hello to my dad; he admired him a lot. My dad was very helpful to Emil when he was down and out--he would bring Thanksgiving dinners to his home. Emil was a very nice man but I don't know what happened to him in later years, maybe he thought that that's the way a star should act.

CP:What did your father do after this?

JM:Someone wanted him to be in a film called *The Jet Set*, about stewardesses or something. They were calling him up and he wanted so badly to do it, but he was stalling them because he was ill--at that point he didn't know that he had cancer. He had even signed a book deal for Moe Howard and the Three Stooges, but this was all about a month before he died.

CP:After the death of Moe, were there any plans to keep the Stooges alive?

JM:No, Norman had no desire to go on with it, either with Joe DeRita or Emil Sitka. But, it was possible that some time after, Mousie Garner and Joe, and someone else were going to ask permission to continue as The New Stooges, but I think that was while my father was still alive. Nothing ever came of it.



TAKING A BREAK ON THE SET OF *HAVE ROCKET, WILL TRAVEL*

THE FAB THREE IN THEIR PRIME

CP:Why did your father continue on with the Stooges so late in his life?

JM:My father wanted this to go on, he loved what he was doing. Maybe at that point in time he should of retired, gone on to lecture around the country; when he did the audiences loved to hear him speak, he had such a wonderful rapport with them.

CP:Where is Emil Sitka now.

JM:He's still around, living in the Tarzana (Calif.) area. I don't think he's still acting.

CP:What ever became of Curly Joe DeRita?

JM:After Moe's death, Joe decided to assemble a new group of Stooges. I do not recall who he chose. He made the attempt but for one reason or another, it never came to pass.

CP:Where is he now?

JM:He's living in the San Fernando valley. He originally was in the North Hollywood area, but has since moved to Burbank. He is not well and has trouble with his vision. I know he likes listening to classical music and watching TV, so that's probably how he spends his time. He has been retired for the past 10 years or so.

CP:What do you do these days keeping the works of the Stooges alive?

JM:Various things. On Saturday, June 17th, I'll be at the Movieland Wax Museum in Buena Park; I will be the judge of a Three Stooges Pie-Throwing and Seltzer-Spritzing contest in honor of my father's birthday which is the 19th. I'll be at the 1989 Three Stooges convention in Trevose, Pennsylvania on July 22nd and 23rd where the theme of this year's convention will be *A Half Wit's Holiday*. Lou Costello's daughter Chris will also be there. I answer every piece of mail that comes in. I also hope to do more creative things, I hope to get back onto another book project.

CP:As an aside, weren't you on the *David Letterman* show once? What did you think of that?

(Con't. P. 19)

COMIC BOOK CONFIDENTIAL

Recently, New York's Film Forum played host to what can be considered one of the more definitive documentaries chronicling the history of comicbooks and comic art from the 30's up until today. *Comicbook Confidential*, a creation of Canadian born Ron Mann, takes painstaking care in its presentation of the original artwork from such comic luminaries as Will Eisner, Al Feldstein, Robert Crumb, Bill Griffith, Art Spiegelman, etc.

The film essentially is a celluloid comicbook, with the individual artists reading over frames of their work. Mann, whose previous documentaries include *Imagine the Sound* and *Poetry in Motion*, creates a sort of living comicbook feel throughout the entire film, from over-dramatic narrations to multi-colored inter-sequence titles. The historical background covered goes into the 1950's anti-comic crusades by parents groups and the U.S. government, and there's a really interesting bit of footage included showing a very young looking Bill Gaines (Mad magazine) being grilled by an anti-comicbook Senate sub-committee during the McCarthy era.

We had an opportunity to speak with Mann about his award winning documentary (garnering last year's Genie award for best documentary). Also, two of the artists represented in the film--Bill Griffith, creator of *Zippy the Pinhead*, and Harvey Pekar, creator of *American Splendor*, were more than happy to discuss their involvement with *Comicbook Confidential*, as well as the motivational forces behind why they do what they do.

RON MANN

CP:Did you like comics as a kid?

RM:I liked *Mad Magazine*, that's what I grew up reading, and that's what probably changed my whole way of looking at the world--its' parody and satire. Other than *Mad*, I read a few superheros--I had a small collection, but my parents didn't want me reading comics. It was really a hangover from the 50's, where they said comics would lead to juvenile delinquency, which was true (laughs). B.P. Nickel, the poet, who was a friend of mine (he recently passed away and the film is dedicated to him) really turned me on to people like Bill Griffith, Linda Barry, Harvey Pekar, Raw magazine--this was in 1985. I went to this comic store on Queen Street (in Toronto) and saw all these comics I never imagined existed. It was mindblowing. I then felt it was important to make a documentary about these people who were really saying something through a medium that most people think has been reserved for kids. I wanted to preserve the history--like I've done with my other films that document Jazz and North American poets.

CP:When did you know you wanted to be a filmmaker?

RM:When I was 12 years old; that's all I wanted to do. I won this award when I was 12, a PBS award, it was a big deal for me. I grew up in front of TV and films--my generation. I had a really wonderful time growing up in the 60's. I felt I was more aware of what was going on at the time, the culture, the politics, than most kids at the time. I was reading the books of William Burroughs and Jack Kerouac, listening to Bob Dillon. I had a real feel of what was going on. One of the films I made back then was a documentary about the Viet Nam war called *When*, when will the war be over.

CP:How did you get your start making films?

RM:My aunt gave me a Super-8 camera, and I just went with it. When I was 16, I made my first 16 mm film; I saved all my money and just made it. I just watched alot of films and picked up the language; film's a language. I learned about filmmaking by just doing it. After making several short film, I got a grant from the Toronto Arts Council. I was going to make a film about alternative education students, something I was personally involved with, but I decided to make a few animated shorts instead. I was working in a record store at the time. I was in the Jazz dept., which really got me into it and inspired me to make *Imagine The Sound*--I was in the University of Toronto at the time. I had written a screenplay about a ghost story, but realized that I have to make the kind of films I want now, not a bunch of "B" films that'll make alot of money, and that's when I made *Imagine The Sound*.

CP:How did you raise the money?

RM:I learned by default, by just figuring it out. I raised it; from doctors, dentists. The Canadian film industry is more nurturing that the United States film industry. I could not make the films I make in Canada in the U.S.

CP:In *Comicbook Confidential*, why did you stay away from animation in favor of having the individual artists read their works while panels of the comics were shown?

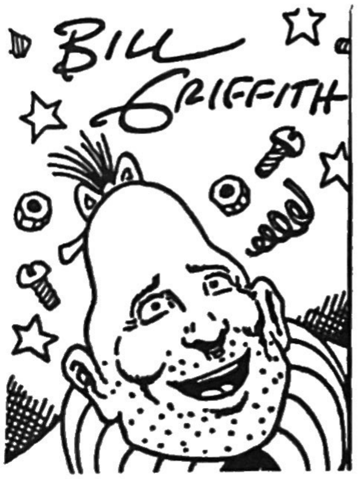
RM:I didn't want it degenerating into a Saturday morning cartoon. It's a completely different tradition. I wanted to collaborate directly with the artists, I wanted the voice to be a direct extension of the artist, like the pens and inks they use are direct extensions. I wanted to preserve the integrity of the artwork. I'm not a comicbook person, I'm a filmmaker, and I wanted to come up with a presentation that would best preserve and present their form of art within the parameters of my form.

CP:Who is your favorite artist from *Comicbook Confidential*?

RM:Robert Crumb. By Far--I read his work and I laugh; he really does something to me.I identify with his art because of the times I grew up in--they were the times he wrote and drew about.

CP:What are you working on now?

RM:I'm working on a film that documents popular dance; I can't believe there has never been a film on popular dance, so that's why I'm doing it. I'm also working on something with Firesign Theater.



CP:Did you read comics as a kid?

BG:Oh yeah, obsessively. Most Uncle Scrooge and the other Disney stuff; I wasn't really a superhero fan. I also read Little Lulu, which I had to read secretly, because it was for girls. When EC's came along, when I was about 9 or 10, I started reading those -- mostly Mad, the Kurtzman Mad's.

CP:Did they leave much of an impression on you?

BG:Yes, tremendous. "Wallywood" warped my mind forever. Especially since they were forbidden -- my father wouldn't let them in the house, so of course I went to the candy store, bought them and left them there, which I regret to this day. I could not bring them back into the house. Elvis Presley and Mad Magazine were taboo.

CP:Were there any events in your childhood that foreshadowed your future profession?

BG:Well, my mother had an affair with a cartoonist for 10 years whose name I cannot reveal. Also, I was an army brat, so was Robert Crumb as well as some of my other fellow underground comic artists of the old days. Maybe that has something to do with it. Alot of cartoonists have authoritarian fathers and creative mothers -- something I'm on the verge of almost doing research on because it's so common.

CP:How was your relationship with your father?

BG:Pretty strained, pretty alienated, and very unsatisfying because he died just as I started making a success in comics which would have thrilled him. He gave up on me when I went to art school and all he cared about was would I make a living or be a bum, and just before he died I proved I could make a living. Looking back on it, he instilled a great sense of humor in me, he was a great story teller -- elaborate, rambling stories every night when I was a kid.

CP:As an army brat, you must have moved around quite a bit. Where did you spend most of your childhood?

BG:I did move around alot; spent 2 years in Germany, but I grew up mainly in Levittown, Long Island. I lived in Levittown from '52 to '62. Levittown was a nice place to escape to. When I was there, it was like an experimental community; it was one of the first pre-fab towns. The fifties were very secure and conformist and so was Levittown, but you still felt like you were part of some kind of social experiment.

CP:What was your earliest experience with cartooning?

BG:I started drawing caricatures of all the kids and teachers inmy classes at around second or third grade. I passed them around and usually got caught and kept after school for drawing. I always associated comic drawing with being punished; I think that's where the satirist in me comes from because you did something you liked that was taboo, and everyone liked it except the target of the joke, and the target was the one in charge so you got punished for what you did, but at the same time you got this thrill for speaking for the world. The other kids loved it when I drew the teachers as monsters; I guess I had the idea in a primitive way what a cartoonist was supposed to be.

CP:You've seemed to always be at odds with authority figures. Is that why Zippy is so non©conformist and irreverant?

BG:I think so. I think I always felt that I was an outsider, so I decided to make a living as an outsider.

CP:In Comicbook Confidential, you were the only artist that got to show your character in action, but it was live action as opposed to an animation. Why was this?

BG:Well, Zippy, to me, is sort of a living, breathing creature. We're in the middle of creating a live action Zippy movie and every assumes that it's going to be animation, and they also ask the same question. To me, Zippy is already alive. When I draw Zippy, I'm drawing from nature. When I dream of Zippy, I dream a three dimentional walking figure, not a drawing. It's been my dream to show Zippy in a movie, to communicate things with his body language, his voice, the way his eyes would look; all these things are really not in the area of comics. Animation is a great form, but you lose so much control. Thirty people in Singapore would be doing all my drawing; I'd have such a distant feeling from it, I'd do a story board and hope it would look alright. With the movie as it will be, I've written the screenplay with my wife; I'm completely, intimately involved with the director, Ernie Facilios (Hardware Wars, Porklips Now). And, our Zippy is Randy Quaid.

CP:How long have you been working on this project?

BG:This movie has been five years in the making. My guess is that within six months we'll be in production. There were nine rewrites, not because the screenplay needed any, but because we went through so many different interested companies, including Michael Nesmith's Pacific Arts, who we spent a year and a half with but he didn't know how to get it made.

CP:So who's hands is Zippy the Movie in now?

BG:We have this loose relationship with Bill McKewen, who executive produced the first Pee Wee Herman movie and all of Steve Martin's movies up until a few years ago. He actually brought us to Ernie Facilious, who we first spoke with five years ago when this whole thing started, so we came full circle through five directors and several production companies to end up back with Ernie, and now I think we're ready to go.

CP:Where will it be made?

BG:There will be establishing shots done in San Francisco because of one of the characters in the film, but the whole movie takesplace in this sort of brand-X town, somewhere in mid-America. Kind of like Levittown, but a little older. We're currently searching for the type of town where McDonald's never quite got there, but there's an Astro Burger. Everthings slightly off-center, but very American, and you can't really figure out what decade it's stuck in.

CP:This reminds me what Terry Gilliam tried sort of do in Brazil. What do you think of his work?

BG:I'm not much of a fan. His imagery is breathtaking, but when the special effects are the star of the movie, I tune out. The first half-hour of Brazil I was rivited, but after that he lost me because he started dealing in cliche fantasies: My favorite comedy of all time is King of Comedy, the second would be Broadway Danny Rose; I'm more into realistic satire as opposed to fantasy.

CP:Back to the Zippy movie, have you spoken to Randy Quaid yet? Do you think he will be able to capture the three dimentional qualities of Zippy?

BG:Oh yeah, I know he can. We've been through alot with him. He first came to us through Madonna of all people. Three of four years ago when he was a regular on Saturday Night Live, Madonna was on one night as the special guest and she had one of my books and was reading it in a dressing room, and Randy said, "What's that?". She then said,"Don't you know who Zippy is?" He'd heard of him, but he'd never read a strip before. Coincidentally, about a week later my producer sent Randy a script because we all agreed that Randy would make a great Zippy, so he had been drawn into it as if it was meant to happen. We met with him in LA; I was alittle wary at first because he wasn't my perfect facial Zippy, but he was physically perfect. I want to give Zippy an unpredictable edge, and Randy has so much edge that you have to tone it down, but he's really got it.

CP:What kind of budget are you looking to work with.

BG: The latest budget worked out is for $6.2 million, and the people we're talking to now about producing it are figuring more like $7-$8 million.

CP: Well, more money's better than less.

BG:Well, with 6.2, we'd be able to everything we wanted. There is one expensive special effect scene -- the movie's title is Zippyvision, which refers to various things, but one of the things is that during varous moments in the film which are triggered by either an event or just Zippy's mood, the camera will focus into his eyes and you'll see little stars and planets, and then you see events from Zippy's point of view. This happens in little ways, like he'll be driving his Metro and suddenly come to a screeching stop. The passenger will say why did you stop, and Zippy will counter,"Didn't you just see Ed Norton crossing th' street?", and you look through his eyes and you see a cardboard figure of Ed Norton crossing the street. Then there's a big one that takes place in a

supermarket and becomes sort of a 50's avante guarde dance scene, so those are expensive.

CP:How expensive will it be in getting a Nash Metropolitan?

BG:(laughs)We've already got two of those, 1958 two-tone convertibles; you have to have two when you make a movie, you know. And, it's in my contract that I get to keep one.

CP:That's great. They're great little cars!

BG:They are great. Terrible, terrible engines, but if you just use them on the weekend they're OK. The world's most cartoony car.

CP:To backtrack a bit, you've seemed to have quite an interest in French playwrite Alfred Jarry. What's the deal with that?

BG:Alfred Jarry is kind of one of Zippy's spiritual fathers. I was first exposed to Jarry in college. I read Ubu then and saw his woodcuts and he became an idol of my at that time. I've always enjoyed Ubu, but his life inspired me more than his work. To me, his true contribution was through the way he lived. I had no way to print all of that stuff, so I became a cartoonist and saw a way to put writing and drawing together. I was into comic as a kid, but until the first underground comics of that late 60's, I realized you could put Milton Berle and Alfred Jarry together in one story! Jarry was the father of modern comedy. He was responsible for the likes of Steve Martin, for all non-sequitur humor, all absurdist humor.

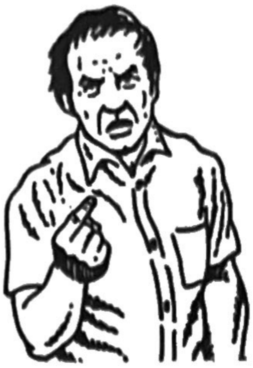
CP:Would you then say that the creation of Zippy was sort of in homage to Jarry?

BG: Yes, although not many people are aware of Jarry and his works today.

CP:On a similar topic, what is your interest in surrealism?

BG:Dadaism more than surrealism, because dadaism was more of a literary movement, and a little more playful. Surrealism tends to take itself too seriously; it starts out playful, but then it gets too didactic and political. Salvador Dali was fun, but there was no self-deprecation The dadaist were making fun of themeselves as much as everything else, but both have alot to do with my way of doing comics.

HARVEY PEKAR



CP:Did you read comics as a kid?

HP:Yeah, I read and collected them. When I was in elementary school, I probably read more comics that the average kid, but I also grew tired of them just as fast.

CP:What kind of comics were you drawn to?

HP:The first stuff I was drawn to were the superheros, but I got tired of those. I guess toward the end of my official comic reading phase I started getting into the *Little Lulu* comics which I thought were better -- I got over that power trip shit with the superheros. There were a few parodies of superheros like *Plastic Man* and *The Spirit* that I thought were good.

CP:What was growing up in Cleveland like?

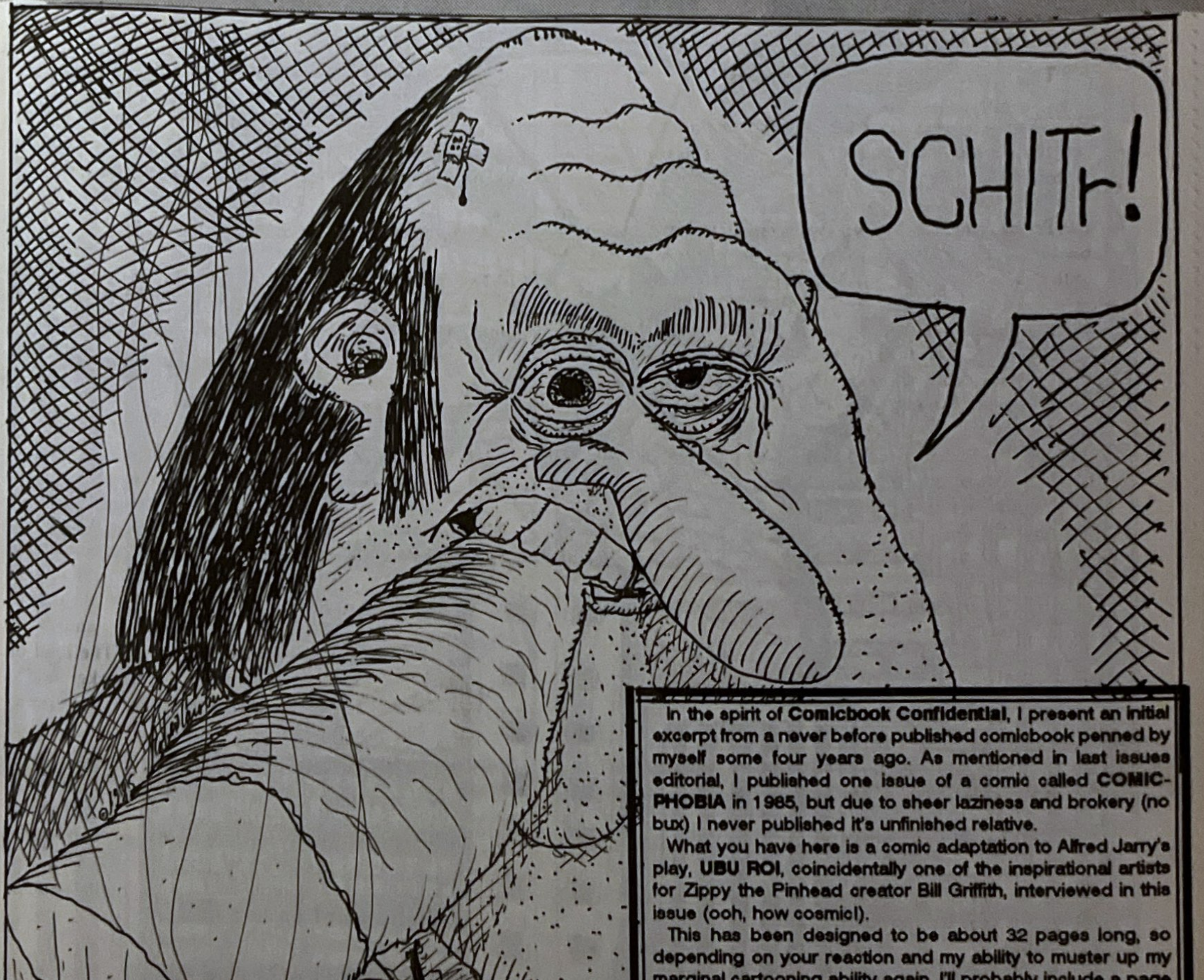
HP:Well, both my parents were from Poland, and they had a Mom and Pop grocery store here. We lived in a changing neighborhood -- I was the only white kid on the street. All my life I've lived in area where there has been a large black population; working class areas, and very frequently a large Italian population as well. The kind of backgound I've had, a Jewish working class background -- there are very few guys left like me, they've all gone on to make alot more money! I think I had more or less a normal childhood. I was a pretty good athelete when I was a kid. My parents were very strict, conservative people who lived withing this yiddish-speaking Jewish community and didn't have any need to go outside of it, comsequently I had maybe more social problems than guys in my neighborhood because their parents were more modern than mine, but it wasn't anything traumatic.

CP:Do you feel then that your working-class background had inspired you to write comics abouth the day to day lifes of average people?

HP:Yeah, I always felt that I should write about the kind of stuff I knew. I think that what I know and the people that I

(Con't. P. 19)

COMIC PHOBIA

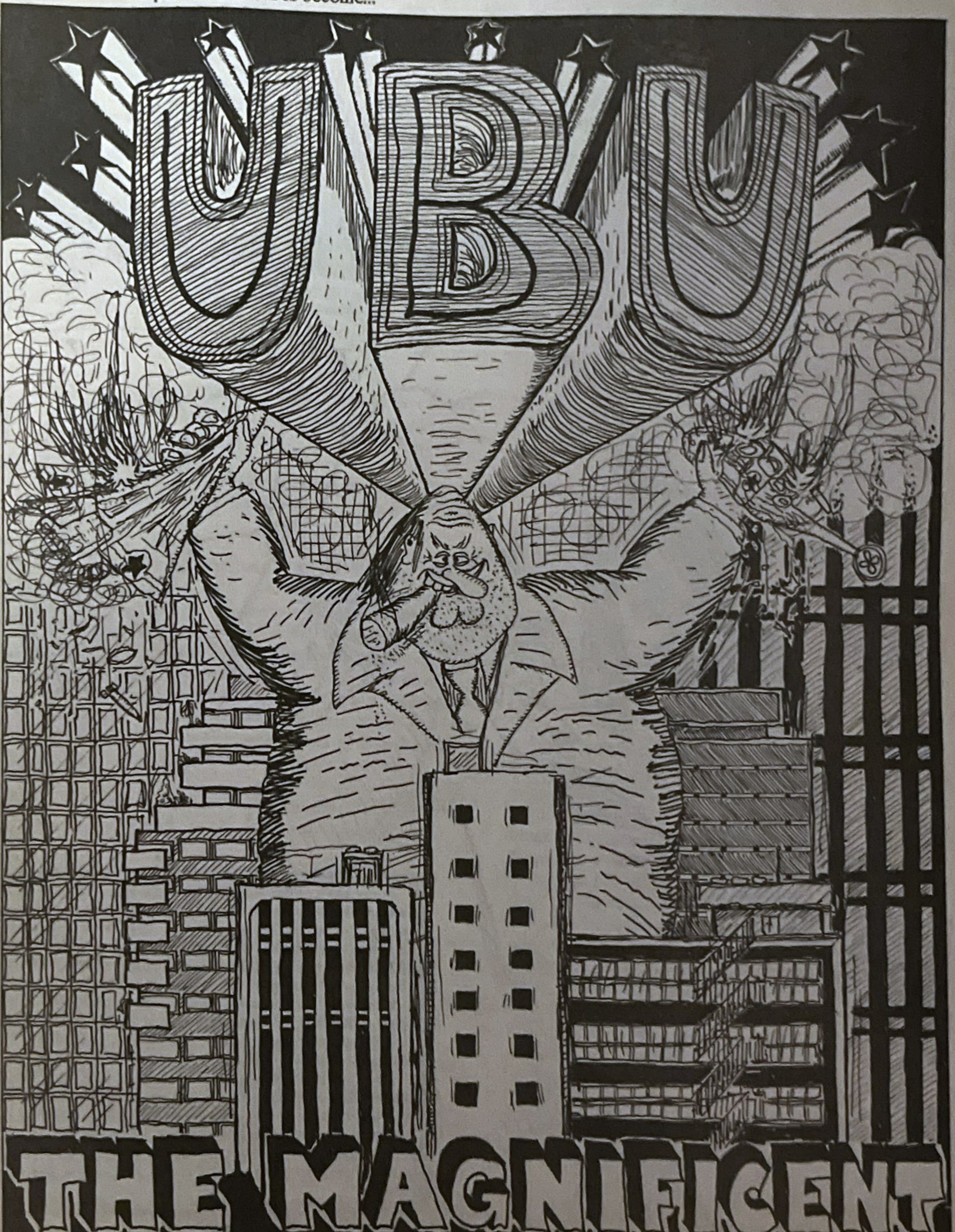


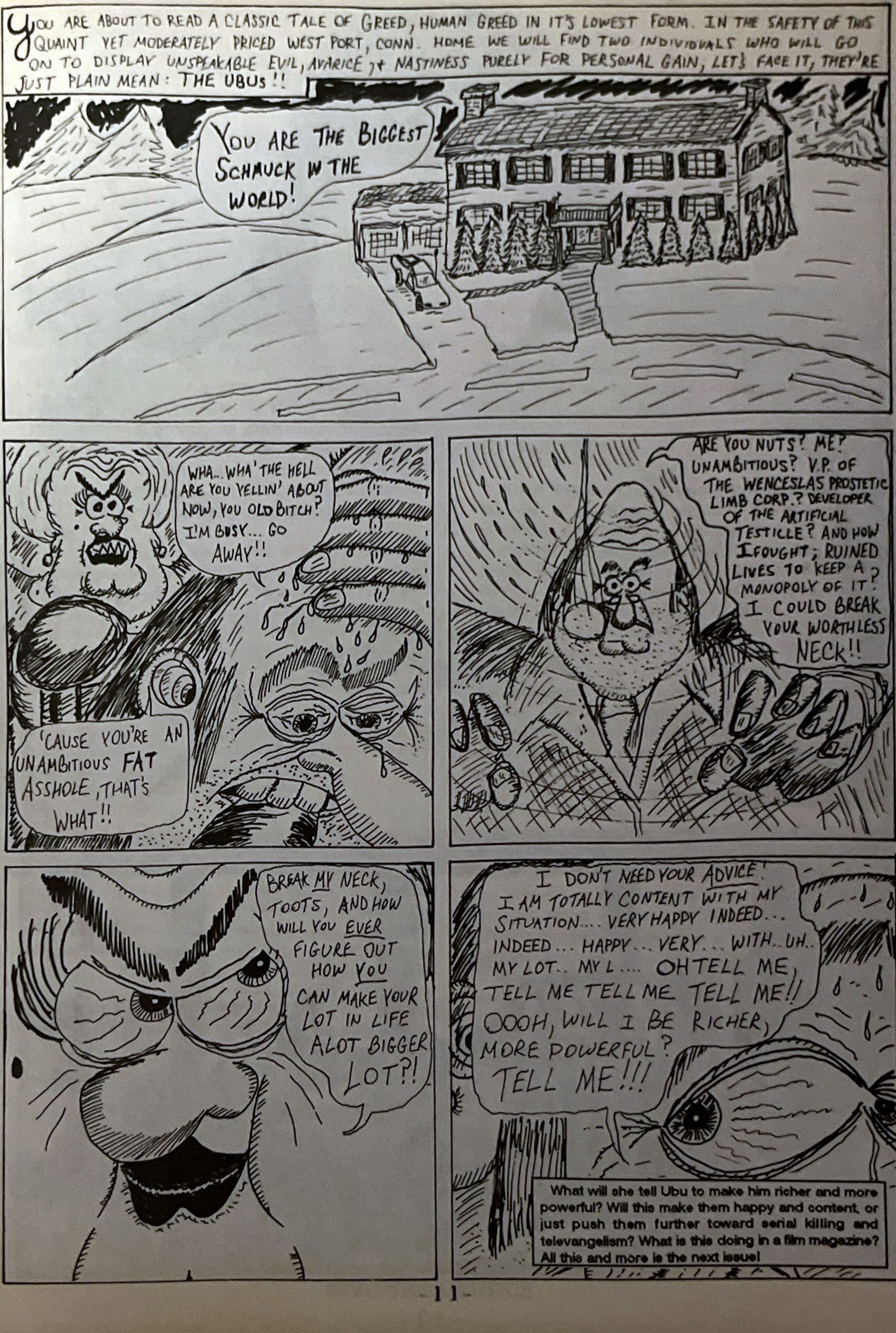
In the spirit of **Comicbook Confidential**, I present an initial excerpt from a never before published comicbook penned by myself some four years ago. As mentioned in last issues editorial, I published one issue of a comic called **COMIC-PHOBIA** in 1985, but due to sheer laziness and brokery (no bux) I never published it's unfinished relative.

What you have here is a comic adaptation to Alfred Jarry's play, **UBU ROI**, coincidentally one of the inspirational artists for Zippy the Pinhead creator Bill Griffith, interviewed in this issue (ooh, how cosmic!).

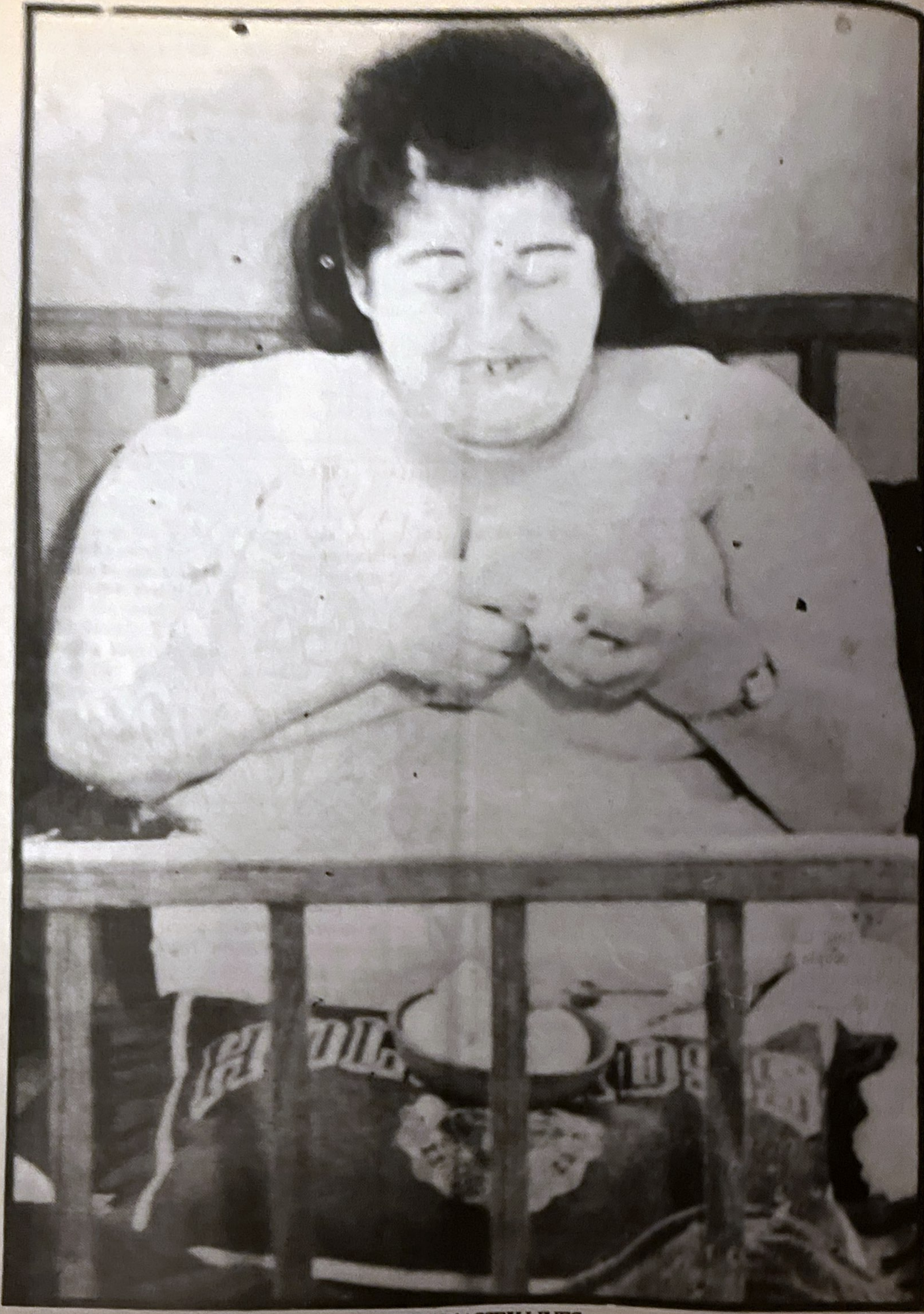
This has been designed to be about 32 pages long, so depending on your reaction and my ability to muster up my marginal cartooning ability again, I'll probably include a page an issue–and then you can eventually clip all the pages out and staple them together, and eventually have your very own badly drawn comicbook (yes, in my opinion, it is one word!). **-RC**

You are about to read an adaptation of a 19th century play by French playwright Alfred Jarry entitled **Ubu Roi** (King Ubu). The central character is Pere Ubu, a bloated apparition of insatiable desire, a grotesque caricature of the true nature of man. The action in **Ubu Roi** takes place in 19th century Poland; here it will exist in 20th century corporate America to become...




YOU ARE ABOUT TO READ A CLASSIC TALE OF GREED, HUMAN GREED IN IT'S LOWEST FORM. IN THE SAFETY OF THIS QUAINT YET MODERATELY PRICED WEST PORT, CONN. HOME WE WILL FIND TWO INDIVIDUALS WHO WILL GO ON TO DISPLAY UNSPEAKABLE EVIL, AVARICE, + NASTINESS PURELY FOR PERSONAL GAIN, LET'S FACE IT, THEY'RE JUST PLAIN MEAN: THE UBUS!!
YOU ARE THE BIGGEST SCHMUCK IN THE WORLD!
WHA... WHA' THE HELL ARE YOU YELLIN' ABOUT NOW, YOU OLD BITCH? I'M BUSY... GO AWAY!!
'CAUSE YOU'RE AN UNAMBITIOUS FAT ASSHOLE, THAT'S WHAT!!
ARE YOU NUTS? ME? UNAMBITIOUS? V.P. OF THE WENCESLAS PROSTETIC LIMB CORP.? DEVELOPER OF THE ARTIFICIAL TESTICLE? AND HOW I FOUGHT; RUINED LIVES TO KEEP A MONOPOLY OF IT? I COULD BREAK YOUR WORTHLESS NECK!!
BREAK MY NECK, TOOTS, AND HOW WILL YOU EVER FIGURE OUT HOW YOU CAN MAKE YOUR LOT IN LIFE ALOT BIGGER LOT?!
I DON'T NEED YOUR ADVICE! I AM TOTALLY CONTENT WITH MY SITUATION.... VERY HAPPY INDEED... INDEED... HAPPY... VERY... WITH.. UH.. MY LOT.. MY L.... OH TELL ME, TELL ME TELL ME TELL ME!! OOOH, WILL I BE RICHER, MORE POWERFUL? TELL ME!!!

What will she tell Ubu to make him richer and more powerful? Will this make them happy and content, or just push them further toward serial killing and televangelism? What is this doing in a film magazine? All this and more is the next issue!



EDITH MASSEY LIVES

THE BATMAN

RICHARD BEHRENS

BATMAN, THE CITY

Gotham City is in deep trouble. In the words of one of its most infamous citizens, the Joker, it needs an enema.

The opening shots of Tim Burton's long awaited Batman reveals a Gotham that is as awe inspiring and terrible as a hideous nightmare full of demons and lost souls. The skyline resembles a rancid Jersey chemical plant, the buildings are immense gothic edifices speckled with gargoyles and haunting statues, the storefronts riddled with torn and flapping posters, the gutters filled with garbage blowing like tumbleweed over the derelicts and stretch limos. A rich couple emerges from a variety hall and searches frantically for a taxi, panic striken that they are left stranded on the sidewalks with the beggers and drug pushers.

Gotham City is not a happy place, a far cry from the 60's television portrayal of a model American citadel where a half hour is all it takes to put the bank robbers behind bars. In Burton's film, the Dark Knight of the Gotham streets does not stand around Commissioner Gordon's office flexing his blue gloves and preaching morality to the assembled press corps. This Batman is a furtive vigilante, having little interest in a police force who he knows to be as corrupt as the criminals. The crisis in Batman is not a case of a looted bank vault or a kidnapped politician: the Caped Crusader is out to save Gotham's very soul from something far more dangerous than crime.

Batman's city is slowly going insane.

BATMAN, THE HERO

It is a time honored theme of story telling that the king and his land is one. When the king falls ill, his kingdom slowly rots, the trees decay, the soil ceases to yield crops, and the people starve. It is the role of the Hero to go off on his quest and save the dying land. Parsival went to capture the Spear of Destiny, the Round Court Knights went off to find the Holy Grail, Jason and the Argonauts set sail to seek the Golden Fleece, etc.

Batman is a modern day knight out to restore the health of his own land, a city populated by diseased people. The ugliness of poisoned air and polluted gutters run through the film like an invasion of cancer cells: plastic surgeons operate with unsterilized instruments; sulfuric acid and deadly laughing gas squirts from artificial lapel flowers; supermarket cosmetics contain poisons that invade and atrophy the nervous system; chemical plants sit under billowing gas clouds; even the masonry of the Gotham City cathedral is crumbling into stone powder ("They don't build `em like they used to!" the Joker snarls while kicking the turret molding away with leg kicks).

Batman is the Moon Hero, stalking the night in the guise of a nocturnal beast of prey. In one startling shot, the Batplane, shaped with the winged spread of the Hero's chestplate logo, breaks through the clouds of the skyshelf and floats silhouetted against the glowing orb of the full moon. Unlike Superman, the Sun God ofMetropolis, Batman is the creature lurking about on the dark side where the nightmares fester.

By chasing away the boogeymen of the black dreams, Batman is purging his city of its terrifying illness. Lunacy is the disease most often associated with the moon and the Joker's deformed and discolored face certainly resembles that bright shining satellite. By tackling the reign of horror perpetrated by the Madman, the Hero is dancing with the Devil by the pale light of the moon.

BATMAN, THE MAN

Bruce Wayne is the character who should rightfully be at the heart of any Batman tale, so it was quite a shock to many fans that comic actor Michael Keaton had been cast as the orphaned millionaire. Traditionally, Wayne is a tall, husky, well-toned man with a dark brooding presence. Keaton, however, comes across as miniature, smaller in stature than his arch nemesis the Joker, soft spoken and even looking a bit confused and uncertain of himself.

But it is those Batman fans who want the dashing camp of Adam West or the rugged passionless vigor of an Arnold Swarzennegger who are troubled by the choice of Michael Keaton. The Bruce Wayne in the new film is a deeply injured man, brooding with intense neurotic conflicts and most likely on the verge of a severe mental collapse. The director of the film has described Keaton's characterization as "the kind of person who should have been in therapy a long, long time ago."

Wayne is an anti-Hero of what Wilhelm Reich described as "The Emotional Plague." He is obsessed with military armor from all over the world and fills an entire gallery of his mansion with the battle worthy suits. His most treasured armor, of course, is his own Batman suit, which keeps him tightly suspended in a world of neuromuscular strangulation, pro-tecting him against the bites and bullets of the cold harsh world. Even his Batmobile is rigged to enclose itself, at the push of a button, in impenetrable armor, making vandalism or entry impossible.

Ultimately it is entry into the mind of Bruce Wayne that is being protected. He keeps an intense distance between himself and other people, inviting Vicky Vale to his oversized mansion and seating himself at the opposite end of a laughingly long dinner table. The Batman armor is his best defense against the world, and when Vale corners him in the batcave wearing nothing but a loosened shirt and slacks, he is particularly vulnerable.

"Why won't you let me in?" she asks pleadingly. "You are in," he explains, as if to say, this is the closest you are going to get.

BATMAN, THE DEMON

It was the mental illness of a very unbalanced man who took the lives of Bruce Wayne's parents. On that time remote Gotham night, Bruce watched in horror as Jack Napier gunned down his mom and dad in cold blood and the young boy was possessed by a demon that planted itself in his tender soul and never let go. The name of that demon was the Dancing Devil and Bruce recognized it decades later as a shock white face under tousled green hair and gaudy red lips. There is no more horrifying image of insanity anywhere in American cinema than Jack Nicholson's Joker.

In contrast to Batman, the Joker is loose and flowing, dressed in silken pin striped suits, floppy ties, and surrounded by lots of gas clouds, vapour trails, and cascading spray paint. Unlike the comparatively harmless Joker of Caesar Romero, Nicholson's Clown Prince of Crime commits hideous acts of sadism: his palmed joy buzzer not only electrocutes his enemies but reduces them to charred hamburger meat, he disfigures his sex slave's face with sulfuric acid, delivers the mutilated remains of his victims to newspaper reporters as calling cards, and attempts to kill the entire city population with his terrifying laughing gas.

But the Joker and Batman have created each other, they reflect two sides of the same coin (perhaps a theme that will re-emerge when Harvey Dent, the infamous Two Face, is revived in the sequel). The Madman and the Hero are both fighting for possession of the city, but the former has danced with the devil while the latter has refused. In the final showdown, the Joker waltzes with a terrified Vicky Vale while Batman slugs it out with the chaotic henchmen in the belfrey of a dilapidated cathedral. It can be argued that Burton's film makes a serious error in depicting Jack Napier as mentally deranged before his mutilating accident (coincidentally, another performance given by Nicholson--Jack Torrence in Kubrick's *The Shining* showed the same kind of uneven descent into insanity). It was a brilliant tour de force on the part of comic writer Alan Moore, who penned the best selling graphic novel *THE KILLING JOKE* (1988), that the Joker was once a pathetic stand-up comedian, struggling to put together the shattered remains of his failed life, and turning to crime only to prevent his wife and child from going hungry. Upon the death of his family and the crippling plunge into the chemical vat, he choose madness over being destroyed by the pain and sorrow. In their final showdown, the Joker, who does not know Batman's secret identity, guesses correctly that the Caped Crusader too has a tragedy in his past that accounts for his present instability.

All it takes is one bad day to reduce the sanest man alive to lunacy," the Joker cackles. "You had a bad day and everything changed. Why else would you dress up like a flying rat."

But Nicholson's Napier at the start of the film is not exactly the sanest man alive. The bite of his transformation, as well as its tragedy, has been defused, and with it a potential to significantly enlarge the Batman/Joker duality.

BATMAN, THE PRODUCT

Tim Burton's Batman opened on June 23rd across the country, but its presence was indeliably stamped in the public mind long before that. An explosion of media products emerged from nowhere: t-shirts, bookbags, short pants, baseball caps, comic book and novel versions of the film, bubble gum cards, keychains, etc. There was something sinister about the way in which an entire country's population took on the role of doing free promotional advertising for Warner Brothers.

The actual premiere of the film seemed almost anticlimatic. Fans knew the plot scene by scene long before June 23rd, readers of Mad magazine had already read the satire, the trading cards lined up in numerical order and flipped with the thumb could have given them a mini-tour of the film. But they flock obsessively to the quad theaters where the film is playing in all four auditoriums at once.

Obviously Batman the movie product is nothing less than a sociological phenomenon. It would seem unusual that the nation could get so heated and excited about a dark nightmare of a film whose own Hero is borderline psychopathic. The theater banners announcing the film proclaimed: "This summer we blow the lid off the myth." You would think that America would want their myth back, not to explode it. But then again, we are living in an age where teenagers flock around Freddie Krueger they way they used to croon over Elvis Presley back in the 50's. Young boys go to bed at night with the Elm Street slasher's face postered up over their beds and jack off looking at Fangoria while their porno mags lie unopened under their mattress.

It is not a very healthy age to live in: rock concerts are are nightmarishly bloated with their political and social import completely stripped; television shows and baseball games have reached a scale and scope the size of the steel industry; and our own government trades in heroin to finace South American murderers. Now we turn towards the Batman to save us all from going insane. And unlike the Indians who turned to Ghandi, or the blacks who turned to Martin Luther King, we have turned, as is typical of our age, to a media product.

INTERVIEW:
ALYCE WITTENSTEIN

ELLEN LEVIT

It's encouraging and inspiring to speak with artists who don't isolate themselves from "the common folk," and who are down-to-earth people with interesting ambitions and stories to tell. Alyce Wittenstein, director/producer of *Betaville* (reviewed in the June '89 issue of Cinemaphobia) and the soon-to-be-released *No Such Thing As Gravity* is a hardworking New York filmmaker, full of enthusiasm and creative ideas. I recently had a chance to speak with Ms. Wittenstein at her West Broadway location where she had a great deal to say about filmmaking, the shaping of her life and craft, and about our society in general.

CP:Where are you from originally? What was your childhood like?

AW:I'm from Forest Hills. It was interesting for me growing up there because I'm a blond, and it's a neighborhood where nobody is blond! I always felt sort of strange. I went to the same school as the Ramones: Forest Hills HS. I used to hitch rides to Rockaway Beach, so it was funny when their song about it came out. During high school I used to hang out in Washington Square Park with David Peel, go to Brighton Beach and bang on garbage cans, singing "The Pope Smokes Dope."

I used to have this attitude about Queens, like I was embarrassed to be from there--but I really don't feel that way about it anymore. When I was 14 or 15 years old, I was staying out until 5 AM, and my parents were probably wondering what horrible things I was doing. But I wasn't doing anything--I was just there. I wasn't drinking, because I didn't have any money! It was good for me that my parents were pretty lenient--it forced me to come up with my own values.

CP:When you were a kid, did you always want to make films? Was this your big dream?

AW:I'd always wanted to be a painter. I still do paint. I started drawing because I was so bored in school. Filmmaking was something I went into because my parents discouraged me so much from painting; they thought it was a completely impractical thing to do. But then we all realized that filmmaking is a thousand times more impractical than painting! I'm really not one of these people who was "born to be a filmmaker." I paint, I write, I like to make costumes, I like to do all these different types of things. Filmmaking really combines a lot of these things that I like to do.

CP:You like the "package deal" surrounding the production of films?

AW:Yes, and I also love to act. I'm in *No Such Thing As Gravity*

CP:How do you fund your films?

AW:I get private investors to do it as a tax write-off, which is more difficult now (since tax laws have changed). I've never gotten a grant. It's easier to get people to invest. Grants are so bureaucratic. It's worse dealing with the "art world" than with the "business world." It's easier to convince somebody to do something for economic reasons.

CP:Have you held other jobs? Do you hold them while you make your films?

AW:I've done all kinds of things, from working as a researcher for PBS and as a video engineer at NBC, to working as a computer operator and I've even been a paralegal. I found I really liked working on Wall Street when I had the chance. The people there were very down to earth--they had a good sense of humor and seemed well-rounded.

CP:How do you juggle working and making films at the same time?

AW:Sometimes I just save up a lot of money. With *Betaville*, I worked full time all the way up until the beginning of the shoot. This time (for *No Such...*) I just saved up a lot of money, and took off a month and a half. It's not easy, but I had to do it!

CP:Let's talk about *Betaville*. I saw a sense of naivety in it--was this intended?

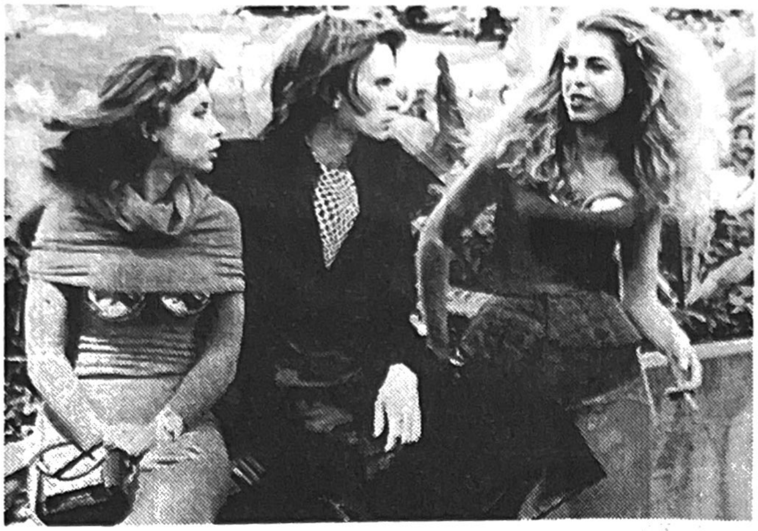
AW:It was intended to be a very innocent film. Even the sex scenes have no sex. One of the reasons I made *Betaville* was for political (analysis). Another was that I'd just broken up with this guy. I was so angry at him, so the "Beta Boys" in the film (annoying socialites) were how I felt about him at the time. He'd gotten so trendy it was horrible! At the end of the film, the girl has killed him (the lead) and now she's stuck with all these assholes, ha ha!

CP:Did the guy you broke up with get to see the film, and see himself portrayed?

AW:Oh, yeah. He's on my mailing list! I usually do films about people I know very well. The characters are based on people I've known for a long time.

CP:Where does the title *No Such Thing as Gravity* come from?

AW:It comes from the old bathroom wall expression, "There's no such thing as gravity--The earth sucks!" Steve O (Steve Ostringer, the lead in *Betaville*) and I wrote the script together, and he thought of the title. I think it's funny.



(FROM LEFT) EMMANUELLE CHAULET, NICK ZEDD, AND ALYCE WITTENSTEIN ON THE SET OF *NO SUCH THING AS GRAVITY*

CP:What does *No Such*... deal with in general?

AW:It's about gentrification of the entire planet--seriously. In *No Such* our planet is taken over by a corporation. We have a completely consumer-goods oriented society, and people who don't fit in are sent to an artificial planet, exiled from Earth. It's like Betaville, with the absurdity about situations. The acting combination is interesting. We play Nick Zedd against Emmanuelle Chaulet, who is a star of the last Eric Rohmer film. She's usually cast as a "Miss Sweetie Pie", so she did my film to change her reputation (where she acts in several racy scenes). Nick plays a lawyer; and he even cries! Taylor Meade plays the judge who exiles people to the other planet. Most of the film was shot at the Hall of Science in Queens, and at its interactive light exhibits, and at the rocketships outside.

Someone reviewed *Betaville* and said it was a very passionate film, and I'm glad that was said. *No Such* is much more passionate. An idea that has really gelled for me lately is that the key to success in filmmaking, in pleasing people, which I am interested in doing, is an element of passion. You can put in violence, sex, nudity -- if there's no passion in the film, it will be boring. Everybody feels a lack of passion in their lives--that's what they want to see in art, in movies: a feeling of intensity, that spark--people who really care about things like society and political convictions. Most people are afraid to do what they really want to do. We need to see that in films.

CP:As a woman making films, do you ever experience sexual bias?

AW:I've had a few weird experiences. One time someone made a crack about my legs at a film lab. Another time I held an audition with Steve O, and this girl just assumed he was the director and stuck her tits in his face. Aside from that, there may be a bias, but I try to ignore it. One of the ways I do that is by not being uptight about being a woman. I'm a director who just happens to be a woman. It's irrelevant. People put too much emphasis on things like sex and race.

CP:You've made an impression on the film world, and yet you haven't worked up that path in the standard way. Why have you chose to go the independent route?

AW:Part of it is that I'm too antsy. I did do some work as a production assistant. I feel that when you go to school and get advice, you're getting the same advice that everyone else is getting. If you do something different, your odds are much better that you'll get someplace. That's what Nick (Zedd) and I have in common.

CP:Could you give aspiring filmmakers some advice on cost-cutting and promotion?

AW:People (often) make films, but are too lazy. They don't want to bother making posters, putting them up, sending out fliers--they don't want to bother doing anything. My advice is to do this stuff yourself. One has to be realistic--use every opportunity to show your film. It's important for people to see it.

CP:Who are your favorite directors, and other influences?

AW:Stanley Kubrick is my all-time favorite. I did love *Dr. Strangelove, Fahrenheit 451*. Jim Thompson is one of my favorite writers. My influences shift. I'm not into bug/creature sci-fi films at all.

Alyce can be contacted through Atomique Film International at 141 West Broadway, New York, NY 10013

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DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENTS

VINCENT ALONZO

"Lights, camera, action!" That's the phrase most closely identified with film directors, but for independent filmmakers, "Who wants coffee?" looms just as large in their daily interaction on the set. Lindley Farley found that out during the filming of *Boss of the Ballet*, his first independent production.

Even though I was the producer, director and writer, the role that took up most of my time was production manager," says Lindley, a 29 year old jack-of-all-trades who has also independently produced a record album and comic book. "I'm used to working on a shoestring, which always means wearing several different hats."

An experienced hand at working on the fringe, Farley recruited an impressive array of behind-the-scene talent including cameraman Bob Stanley and gaffer Tim Smith. Both of them have worked onnationally aired television commercials such as the *Be All You Can Be* army recruitment campaign and major motion pictures such as *Ghostbusters II* started off with very modest plans," says Farley. "I thought I would borrow a friend's 16 millimeter Bolex, but since I was willing to invest $6,000 of my own money in the project, I was able to attract the interest of quality people, which enabled the film to take on the professional attitude that it ultimately did. I was surprised at how easy it was to get top people; it seems that talented craftsman don't get the work you'd expect and most of them are willing to work on an independent production just for the credit in an area in which they aren't currently working. But they won't just jump on board any project, they have to be interested in the filmmaker's vision--that's a very important element."

Farley's project, *Boss of the Ballet*, is a farce about two sanitation workers who try to put on a ballet. Their efforts are hampered by a series of outlandish occurrences that result in violence and destruction rather than artistic creation. "It's a direct reflection of the way I view life," states Farley. "I'd rather have a film that ends with absolute finality as opposed to a sentimental `happily-ever-after' Hollywood ending. I like films with archetypical characters and absolute finality. My film is in the same vein as Bonnie and Clyde, in that it starts off as a comedy and then turns tragic. But *Boss of the Ballet* has a strong absurdist element to it that I hope will sweep the audience past the sentimentality of how sad the ending is and see the humor in it."

Farley makes no bones about the influence that mainstream television and films have had on his creative outlook but point out that he uses the conventional as a jumping off point for his own slightly off-center artistic vision. "We're all children of television in one sense or another. One of my earliest memories is the television coverage of the Kennedy assassination; I think that oriented me to the idea that the good guys don't always win. And of course episodic television had to be an influence, if a kid watches TV it's inescapable. But I get away from that rigid formula that supports the status quo. I do write archetypical characters but I stretch them beyond what the audience expects.

FARLEY (RIGHT) WITH TWO ACTORS ON THE SET OF *BOSS OF THE BALLET*

The two garbagemen in *Boss of the Ballet*, could be Jackie Gleason and Art Carney, or whatever; but I've distorted them so it's as if Ralph and Norton decide to jump off a building to see what would happen, and they get their heads splattered. While Farley completes the editing on *Boss of the Ballet*, he's already looking ahead to his next film, *Double Street*, what he describes as a Man-out-of-control, psuedo-documentary about the crack epidemic in New York City."

Boss of the Ballet turned out to be such a rewarding experience for me that I'm anxious to get the post-production completed and move on. My next film will be a bit less connected to mainstream than *Boss*, because it will reject the traditional narrative structure, hopefully people who've seen *Boss* will give it a chance because they like my work."

Then, almost as an afterthought, Farley adds: "It's hope that makes life endurable, but it's despair that keeps us busy."

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VIDEO: THE POOR MAN'S JAMES BOND GREETS THE RUSSIANS

CONRAD STODDARD

Remember a few years back a film called *Red Dawn* was released about American partisans battling paratrooper Russian invaders somewhere in the mid-west? Well, many of our fellow Americans believe that that's not just a possibility, but the ultimate scenario that's just waiting to unfold in a few years time. If this is to happen, how are we to defend ourselves against the peristroika-crazed Russkies hellbent on looting the nation's 7-11's and Carvel's of some of our greatest national treasures -- Slurpees and Cookie Pusses?

When the chips are down, you call the right man for the right job, and this case it happens to be Kurt Saxon, AKA: The Poor Man's James Bond. All you'll really need is his new videotape, *The Poor Man's James Bond Greets The Russians*, which goes into eye popping details on how us average citizens can wipe out an entire company of Russian soldiers with deadly homemade poison, or blow up a few Soviet troop carriers with a kitchen-made gasoline tank bomb.

All joshing aside, when this tape goes into the machine, Glastnost goes out the window. I'm not going to hazard a guess as to what Kurt's genuine political leanings are, only because the tape is so bizarrely funny while being truly frightening all in the same dimension. Taped in similar fashion to the kind of down home cooking show you'd find while flipping through the cable TV dial, Saxon, decked out in Inspector Clouseau attire, comes off with a friendly demeanor similar to Cajun cooker Justin Wilson. The only difference being Wilson's exclusive use of hot, fiery cajun spices ascompared to Saxon's use of hot, fiery contact explosives! The 60 minute tape goes into detailed explanations of (that can also be found in Saxon's Poor Man's James Bond series of Books), and demonstrations in the construction of incendiary devices and other pyrotechnic lovelies that can be used against our Russian comrades, just in case they tire of subzero Siberian climates and decide to spend a little time in sunny Florida, uninvited. The ease in which such devices can be made is kind of frightening, which makes the tape one of the strangest I've seen in quite some time, and a must-get for those devotees of mayhem and discord. Saxon makes no bones about the dangers inherent in playing around with such "experiments"; he highlights this fact by making mention of the fact that he blew off most of the fingers on one hand during a bout with carelessness ("The most exciting thing that happened to me that day!" beams Saxon upon reflection).

A final note. This tape is truly not for the squeamish. If taken literally, *The Poor Man's James Bond Greets The Russians* would come off as a terrifying example of paranoid delusions meeting violent determination. But, if you look a bit deeper, there's a pretty twisted yet amusing sense of humor running throughout. Julia Child, this ain't, but then again, I'd like to see ol' Julia in hand to hand combat wielding a brie!

THE POOR MAN'S JAMES BOND GREETS THE RUSSIANS is available for
$39.95 (ppd © $2 UPS) through Atlan Formularies, PO Box 327,
Harrison, AR, 72601.

STAR TREK V

MARC I. WHINSTON

Not really much to say about *Star Trek V: The Final Frontier* aside from the fact that Shatner should stick to making Oldsmobile commercials as opposed to trying to direct anything aside from his laughable toupee on his aging, sagging head.

What was supposed to be the storyline for the original, *Star Trek:The Motion Picture*, that being a voyage to the end of the Universe to have a little chat with God, finds itself sort of intact in the fifth (and hopefully last) Trek big screen extravaganza.

The unevenness of direction is typified in a scene widely distributed as a publicity clip. Scotty (James Doohan, looking more and more like the Michelin tire man) says "I know this ship like the back of my hand" just before walking into a wall and knocking himself unconscious. Good slapstick? Well, no, but in any event, in the next scene the audience sees Scotty with a serious head wound, presumably suffered in that funny bumble. Again in another scene, Dr. McCoy (a withered Deforest Kelly) relives the most painful experience of his life: the terminal illness of his father and his decision to kill him in mercy for lack of a cure. The scene as an emotion generator is ruined by Spock's half-brother, Sybock (Lawrence Luckinbill) wandering around the background like a psychopath muttering "This is your pain." People in the audience were laughing their lunch up when a confused Shatner would have wanted them to cry their eyes out!

A few other items:

The *Trek* films seem to be mutating into outlandish, two hour sitcoms; all they need is a laugh track and they're in business.

Aside from the obvious *Star Wars* and *Mad Max* ripoffs, *Trek V* seems a little to much like a Dr Seuss book called *I had trouble getting to Solla Salloo*. I wonder if Ted Geisel is getting any points?

(STOOGE FROM P. 4)

MOE & JOAN

JM:Yes, it was very exciting. I had been told that he could really cut you to ribbons, but he was very nice to me. When I was done with the show, I really felt more comfortable with him that with any other person who had ever interviewed me on television. My appearance led to something funny that happened at the airport after it had been aired. Waiting for a flight, Norman had gone off to get a pack of cigarettes, so while I waited with the luggage, three really hippy-type characters with crazy hair came up to me and said, "Are you who we think you are, were you just on the *David Letterman* show?". I said yes, and we talked a bit; they were really nice. When they left, Norman was coming back and asked who were those characters. I answered laughing, "Norman, those were my fans!"

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JIMMY LIN
VICE PRESIDENT

(PEKAR FROM P. 8)

know are worth writing about because everybody's worth writing about. I mean, everybody's valuable, I think that's a democratic ideal. I find alot of facinating aspects to everyday life that alot of people want to ignore. They get into a working grind and they want to escape that--they want to come home, watch *Dynasty*, imagine they're one of the rich and famous, and I don't like that. I think people shouldn't be ashamed of or devalue themselves and should just try to deal with their own lives. If someone is interested in ordinary people, it's always about something climactic in their lives, like someone's threatened with death, or someone's threatened with the loss of all their possessions, and I think that events like that have less affect on shaping a person's personality that the so-called smaller events that we all go through on a day by day basis, and that's what I focus in on in *American Splendor*.

CP:Who in the world of literature or film do you feel has had an influence on your style of writing?

HP:As far as films, I've really liked some of Vittorio DeSica's works. Daniel Fuchs, who wrote about Brooklyn during the depression had a background very similar to mine. He wrote about the kind of people I knew about, and that had a good impression on me. People influenced me for various reasons. From an autobiograohical standpoint, I was very impressed by Notes From the Underground-- that's not really autobiography but it's in the first person narrative. Then there's Henry Miller, who I've since begun to have serious misgivings about, but that kind of approach immpressed me. And the stream of consciousness writers also, like James Joyce.

CP:What about Charles Bukowski?

HP:Alot of people bring him up because we kind of deal with similar types of people, but I've read more Henry Miller than Bukowski, and I think Bukowski is in the tradition of Miller and like Miller more. There are similarites to both Bukowski and Miller that I'm not too crazy about, like Miller talking about what a great "ass man" he is, or Bukowski talking about his drunkeness. I'm not saying that I'm turned off by it....

CP:Do you have any idiosyncrasis that you like to revel in?

HP:Well, I certainly point out that I have a bad temper, I'm cheap, I'm calculating, stuff like that. But, I don't drink or smoke--I don't mind if other people do, that stuff never did anything for me. When I was around people and they were smoking pot, they'd say, "C'mon, take a toke!", so I'd try it and it wouldn't do anything to me. The only stuff that would ever have an effect on me are antihistamines; that's a pretty cheap high (laughs)!

CP:What did you think of *Comicbook Confidential*, and the way they presented your comic?

HP:I liked it alot; I think it'll introduce alot of different comics to alot of different people who normally would never have heard of them. He (Dir. Ron Mann) put as much as he could in an hour and a half, but there may be people saying there could have been more, or so-and-so wasn't in it and he should have been. I liked what they did with me; alternating between me reading and me reading over a drawn version of me like in *American Splendor*; I thought it was nice. I thought it was inventive, but that kind of technical experimentation hasn't really gotten the kind of attention it deserves.

CP:You mentioned earlier that stories from *American Splendor* had been adapted for the stage. Do you ever see stories from *American Splendor* becomming a film?

HP:First of all, I've written my own script; I got a grant from Playwrights Horizons to write it. I didn't adapt my work--I wrote an original play which is stylistically like American Splendor. It's had a reading and was liked, but the money's not there yet to produce it. We've been considering putting it on videotape instead. I like the video and plays, but comics are the real forum I like to express myself in.

CP:What's your favorite movie?

HP:Vittorio DeSica's *The Bicycle Thief*. I really could identify with it when I saw it.

DESPERATE TEENAGE LOVEDOLLS
MARC I. WHINSTON

It's a world where violence is always around the next corner, and you can't trust anyone. But Bunny, Kitty and Patch, an all-girl three-piece band called the LoveDolls, are determined to rise through the mayhem and rule over this chaotic world in We Got The Power's **Desperate Teenage Lovedolls.**

Forced to become runaways by an uncaring world, the girls get their first break when they hook up with sleazy Johnny Tremaine who promises -- and delivers -- fame and fortune. But there is a price to be paid for his assistance, and there's the She Devils, an all-girl street gang who want to eliminate the LoveDolls.

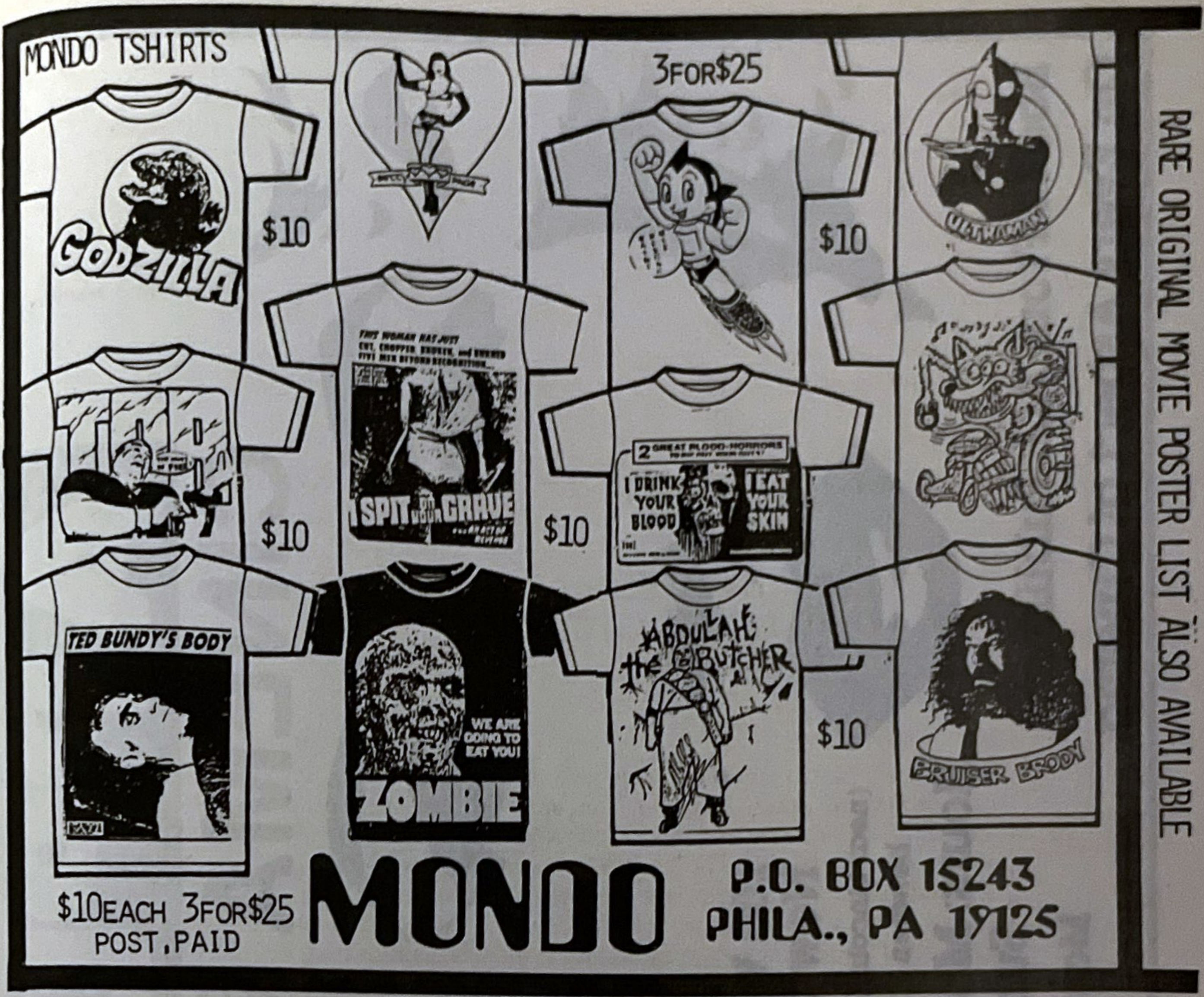
The story is a good idea, and much of it is handled with originality. But more than anything else, DTL seems more like a school assignment than anything else. I got the constant nagging feeling that I was watching a bunch of suburban high school students trying to be outrageous -- and that their idea of outrageous is using a lot of four letter words on tape. A good example is the scene where Tremaine demands "payment" for his services. Great pains are taken to avoid nudity in a situation where it is clearly called for.

Additionally, few of the actors seem confortable in their roles. Steve McDonald, who would be believable as a drug dealer, a fellow singer, or even a sleazoid, falls short off the mark in delivery, and unfortunately doing quite an injustice to DTL in the process.

There are, on the other hand, moments of pure genius. The end of the tape is a well-executed clever idea. Also, there is a sequence near the end that features brilliant cinematography. Sadly, the production values are so poor until that point that I wonder how many viewers will have the patience to get that far. It takes a lot of concentration just to follow the plot.

What, if I were the high school teacher who had to grade this, would I have to say? Good idea, great effort, but needs a little work.

DESPERATE TEENAGE LOVEDOLLS is available for $22.50 (ppd) from:
We Got The Power Films, 3017 Santa Monica Blvd. #314, Santa Monica, CA, 90404



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